

Chris Bilicic

Committee on Higher Education and Development
Public Hearing Testimony

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee thank you for your time today. My name is Chris Bilicic and I am currently a Junior at Trinity College and an Intern for Senator Tony Hwang. I come before you today as not only a college student but a male college student urging you to support Senate Bill 19 addressing Sexual Misconduct on College Campuses. I believe, when talking about any form of sexual misconduct, it is absolutely vital that male students stand with female students in saying enough is enough.

According to the Every Voice coalition, national studies estimate that 1 in 4 college women and 1 in 16 college men will be victims of an attempted or completed rape during their years at college. One-third of women at colleges experience unwanted sexual contact and more than two-thirds experience some form of sexual harassment. Moreover, studies have shown that less than 10% of victims actually report their assaults. Based on these stats, it is clear that a silent epidemic is occurring on all college campuses and many are reluctant to talk about it.

Although I cannot speak for all colleges, I can speak for my own in saying that the bill before you today can be a vital first step in ending this stigma around sexual misconduct on college campuses.

Firstly, establishing a sexual misconduct survey would bring a much-needed sense of transparency and help colleges identify if their educational methods are driving positive change in campus climate. At Trinity, I have witnessed first-hand how a potential survey could truly reveal the extent of this problem. My freshman year all athletes underwent a sexual misconduct seminar where we were given a clicker and gave anonymous answers to questions, such as have you ever been a victim of sexual assault on campus. I remember distinctly the results, both for male and female athletes, shocking me as I couldn't believe so many of my peers had experienced this trauma.

Further, Trinity students host an event called “Take Back the Night” where sexual assault survivors are provided a platform to speak of their experiences and be heard. For those that attend, it is shocking to see how many members of the Trinity community are touched by this. Both of these events have truly made me understand the meaning behind a “silent epidemic”. Students are suffering in silence and until we take this first step in diagnosing the extent of the problem on college campuses this “silent epidemic” will continue. Furthermore, Trinity has a few sexual misconduct preventative programs such as the green dot initiative that trains students on how to be responsible bystanders. Such programs are necessary in ending social norms surrounding sexual misconduct. However, there is no way to measure if programs like green dot are driving change. A climate survey would help colleges evaluate the effectiveness of their preventive programs and identify if new steps must be taken.

Secondly, implementing an amnesty policy to protect students who report or disclose sexual misconduct from disciplinary action can increase reporting. Often times, when sexual misconduct occurs on colleges campuses a substance is involved. It is widely recognized that students who have been using substances at the time of the assault may be hesitant to report it because they fear the consequences of their own conduct. Reports from organizations like the Office for Civil Rights have found amnesty policies can encourage sexual assault reporting. Thus, implementing such a policy can be a critical step towards breaking the silence and changing campus culture.

In closing, I hope you will all support Senate Bill 19 and join me in saying: enough is enough. Let’s start taking steps to ensure college campuses are a safe community and learning environment for all.

Thank you.